

# THE CULTURE OF FACIAL MARK IN IDOMA LAND; BEYOND ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

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*Dennis Anyebe Olofu*

*Doctoral Degree Student at the Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Administration, Nasarawa State University, Keffi. Nasarawa State, Nigeria*

*And*

*Assistant Director, Research and Documentation, National Council For Arts and Culture, Garki II, Abuja.*

*Email: olofudennis@gmail.com*

*Phone Numbers: 08033729477, 09097874767*

## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to study the practice of facial mark in Idoma land. Interacting with people from different parts of Idoma reveals that the art of facial marking majorly intended for beautification has some underlying cultural beliefs, values and myths. The study therefore looked at four (4) aspects of facial mark in Idoma land viz; identification, beautification, medicinal and re-incarnation. The study also investigated the impact of slave trade and the Nigeria civil war on the practice of facial mark in Idomaland. It also appraised current trends, opinions and the future implication of facial mark in Idomaland in particular and Nigeria in general. Both primary and secondary data were deployed in data collection and analysis. Primarily, participant observation and oral interviews were used, while content analysis was deployed as confirmatory secondary data. Findings from the study revealed that the partition and colonization of Africans by Europeans superimposing their culture and making sure that they (Europeans) down played anything that has to do with Africa by giving it all sorts of names and maintaining that it is obnoxious, primitive, repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience. The findings further revealed that the art of facial mark has been consigned into the dustbin of history, re-named and technically replaced by what is termed as “tattoo” which is not significantly different from body markings and adornments.

**Keywords: Culture, facial marks, ethnic identification and cultural belief.**

## INTRODUCTION

Facial mark is a unique feature of African culture and this can be seen not only on the faces and bodies of Africans, but through their various works of arts such as poems, short stories, terra-cotta figurines, artistic wooden mask and carving. This is a clear justification of the provision of the cultural policy for Nigeria in section 5 which stated that culture is best expressed through the medium of the arts such as either literary arts, fine arts, theatrical arts and plastic arts which facial marks clearly fall within it's ambit (FGN, 1998).

Facial marking was found on the bronze terra-cotta figurines of Ile-Ife in Western Nigeria which dates back to between 100 AD to 1600s. Also, in Professor Thurstan Shaws archaeological excavation at Igbo-Ukwu, the bronze pendant of the human face has facial marks. The Igbo-Ukwu finds have been radiocarbon dated to about the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, AD. These facial markings were medium of expression of arts and the meeting point of all expressive behaviors. These expressive behaviors can be classified into three main categories viz-Body ornamentation, body decoration and body adornment. All these are further classified into temporary and permanent arts (Uzochukwu 1986).

As noted above and with the passage of time, these expressive behaviors on figurines shifted to human body. Human body became the template for the expression of all human artistic behaviorss for beauty, religion, status, cultural beliefs, curative purpose etc. this was substantiated by the submission of the Director of Culture and social development in Umudioka, Neni Anambra State, when he said "*much of the art in Africa, nay, in most part of the world is on wood, leather, clay, metal and what have you; but ours is an example of a permanent art on man himself*".(Uzochukwu, 1986.P.10).

With these words, the prevalence of facial marks in different art forms on the various people of Africa as something much more meaningful than just scars or random marks call for serious research. Therefore, the choice of Idoma ethnic nationality case study is not misplaced. I always felt that there had to be significant reasons for someone to mark his or her body permanently hence this research.

Gradually, I realized that there are different reasons for facial marks in idomaland. The first and most popular reason is for identification, then health, protection and decoration.

However, the practice of facial mark is fast fading away, not only in Idomaland, but also in Nigeria. So, it can be said that the art of facial mark has suffered the fate of some of our traditional arts which are generally dismissed as obnoxious, timid, primitive repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscious irrespective of their significance to the lives of the people that practiced these arts just in a bid to give dog a bad name as a justification for hanging it. This classification and the decline in the practice of facial marks in Idomaland is attributed to the influence of modernization, whereby the mode of body decoration is now copied from outside. For instance, most contemporary female adopt the modern body decoration approach of using eye-shadow, lipstick, fingernail paint, foundation, and other body beautification materials. An informant mockingly observed that "*In those days make-up*

*kits was limited to powder and pencil as against the present day when it includes all the building materials from foundation to roofing”.*

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF IDOMA NATION**

The Idoma speaking people of Nigeria occupy a wide geographical area in the Benue-Cross River Basins. For reasons of clarity and the purpose of this presentation, Idoma nation can be grouped as “Core” Idoma and “Peripheral”. The “Core” consists of those Idoma speaking People, which although scattered over wide areas speaks dialect of one language of Idoma. On the other hand, the “Peripheral” Idoma include those groups which over the centuries have been assimilated into Idoma culture and therefore share common traits with some dialectical variations (Erim, 1981).

The “Core” Idoma is today located within three different states. The states are Benue, Nasarawa, and Cross River State. Within Benue State, Idoma inhabit nine (9) Local Government Areas. They are; Ado, Agatu, Apa, Obi, Oju, Ogbadibo, Okpokwu, Otukpo and Ohimini local Government areas. Furthermore, in Gboko local government, such groups as Etulo which also spread into Katsina-Ala local Government area have the same genealogical lineage with Idoma (Erim, 1981)

In Nasarawa State, such other groups as the Doma, Keana, Alosi, Obi and Agwatashi have the same historical lineage with Idoma. In Cross River, we have the Iyala of Ogoja, Ikom and Obubra local Government areas who are also of Idoma extraction, but this time with major differences in dialectical composition of Idoma language ( Erim, 1981). Thus, the “Core” Idoma is scattered over a wide arc from Keana, East of Lafia town through Doma of Nasarawa State and ending up with the Iyala and Ukum in Ogoja local government area of Cross River State (Agbo,2018). For the “Peripheral” Idoma, the arc widens to include the Ito and Oju of modern Igede, Akpa and Akweya which dialectically are distinct from the “Core” Idoma (Agbo,2018).

Indeed, the distribution of the “Peripheral” Idoma include the Ntezi and Akpoto of Abakaliki in the present day Ebonyi State. The Ete of Nssuka in Enugu State also from part of this group. This historical voyage is important because of the trend which facial mark attained at the peak of the Nigeria Civil war and how the practice was brought to its knees thereafter (Okwu, 1976).

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF CULTURE**

The term culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in English Language and already there are three hundred anthropological definitions of the word “culture”. It is what Michael Foucault in Nasidi (2010) calls a repetition of the same. According to him “Everything there is to say has been said, the rest is repetition” ( Nasidi,2010,p.3). The Dictionary of Concept in History defines culture as “the total complex of intellectual and material life of a particular society, a condition of moral and intellectual requirement attained by individual persons, a level of development attained in an entire society and the arts in general – music, the visual arts, literature and so on” (p.25).

UNESCO (19182) defines culture as including the complex whole of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional feature that characterized a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value system, traditions and beliefs.

The cultural policy for Nigeria (1988) in part 1, section 1 (1) defines culture as the “totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbors”. (FGN, 1988, P.5) the policy further stated that culture comprises material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects. The material aspect has to do with artifacts in it broadest form namely: tools, clothing, food, medicine, utensils, housing, etc. the institutional deals with the political, social, legal and economic structures erected to help achieve material and spiritual objectives; while the philosophical is concerned with ideas, beliefs and values, the creative concerns a people’s literature (oral and written) as well as their visual and performing arts which are normally moulded by as well as help mould other aspect of culture. Be this as it may, Bello (1991) however cautioned that culture here is not merely a return to the customs of the past, rather it embodies the attitude of a people to the future of their traditional values faced with the demands of modern technology which is an essential factor of development and progress.

According to Emovon (1990), culture is the arts, customs and beliefs and all other products of human thoughts made by a people at a particular time, culture therefore connotes tradition. This definition by Emovon (1990), above is in tandem with the culture Act of 1942 of the Royal Institute of Thailand (1983) which defines culture as the characteristics that shows growth, order, harmonious progress of the country and good moral standard of the people.

Ekwueme in Baike (2004) stated that culture is a way of life, customs and creative arts of a group of people. She also stated that culture defines the humanity in man; otherwise man remains an animal if he is without culture. She espoused that each society has a social culture that enables the control of society and maintenance of customs and systems in the form of rules, laws, ethics and morals. This position is not different from previous authors so far because the emphasis has been on the people’s way of life in a given society. I am also attracted by Onwumah (2004) forceful assertion that culture could only exist within the framework of a society and that it is an instrument which enables man to imbibe societal norms as it provides means of gratification for compliance and sanctions for deviance.

Gbilekaa (2013) in his role of arts and culture in the transformation agenda defined culture as the values and bonds that bind a community. He stated that it is learned and passed from the older generation to the younger one through symbols, language arts, religion, etc. culture is thus a system of social control wherein people define their standard of behavior, hence cultural value of a community shape its character, identity and personality.

Arthur Bismarck as cited in Gbilekaa (2013) is widely credited for initiating a cultural revolution in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by inspiring the Germans to cultivate a strong

sense of national pride. This spurred Germans to direct production goals towards meeting their values and needs, hence they were ultimately liberated from British influence. Today, Germany is an economic and technological powerhouse and arguably the most important European nation.

The indigenous intelligentsia in India fought to liberate the people mentally to confront imperialism headlong. Today, India is a technologically advanced State based on Indian's cultural heritage as propagated by M.K. Ghandi also as cited in Gbilekaa (2013).

Other examples of successful development programmes hinged on cultural fulcrum include Japan under the visionary Takugow regime and in China under charismatic leadership of Chairman Mao Tse Tung and Deng Xiaoping. Other countries in Asia followed this trend and successfully transformed their society technologically and economically. This is what led to emergence of the "Asian Tigers", (Gbilekaa, 2013).

Aig-Imoukhuede (2005), asserts that culture is heritage, it is poverty or object inherited, allotted or handed down as by ancestors, as physical, natural, tangible or intangible stock or endowment. This supports the view that culture constitutes resources whose spread and utilization reflect on the ways of life of the people in which they are endowed, the way they perceive themselves and as perceived by others; their capacities-human, infrastructural and institutional; their skills and means of translating their endowments into dividends of development (Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, 1996).

From the definitions and scholarly views expressed above and seeing how facial mark was practiced by Idoma ethnic nationality over the years, then, it is proper to assert that facial mark is part of Idoma culture.

## **FACIAL MARK IN IDOMALAND**

Idoma nation is a conglomerate of dialects which formed the ethnic group. For this study not be aloof, a study of two other ethnic groups within the region is desirable and was also embarked upon.

A brief of what facial mark is among the Igala of Kogi State and the Tiv of Benue State will suffice. Among the Igala ethnic nationality, facial scarification has the original purpose of identification. Though, date and origin of facial mark among the Igala as other ethnic nationalities is vague, it however came to prominence during the Nigeria civil war, especially those living at the boarders between the Igbo and present day Edo State, particularly in Ihilo, and Ofante in Olamaboro close to Ehamufu in Enugu State. It became imperative for people living around here to be separated from the Igbo (Bohannan, 1956). The Igala facial mark if properly done is very horrifying and it is done in a way that only one that specializes can do it. It was done by putting knife in the fire and inserting a thumb into the victim's mouth so as to properly bring out the cheek. Facial mark among Igala is first and foremost for ethnic identification, though there are some meant for other purposes too. For example, the Igala also have the Abiku mark. While the mark of identification is a slash of between three to five lines from the mouth to the ear, that of Abiku is a single slash from the nose to the cheek. There is also facial mark in Igala used to repel certain ailment like convulsion and witchcraft.

Among the Tiv ethnic nationality, facial mark is the most important requisite of beauty. Tiv facial mark have special characteristics, however it was vehemently refuted that facial mark in Tiv land are not the same as those found among other ethnic nationalities. Theirs change from generation to generation, though they do not mark lineage, which means facial mark among the Tiv of Benue State is not in any way for ethnic identification, but as a perquisite for beautification (Bohannan, 1956).

Facial mark among the Tiv is usually embarked upon around the puberty and this may continue until a person reaches forty or forty-five years. Designs usually geometric or animal patterns, are made on various parts of the body including the face and solely for decorative purposes. Most of the markings are made with sharp nail or razor, and wounds are rubbed with charcoal or indigo to raise or color the scars. Facial mark is usually found among the Tivs of Aliade, Makurdi and Gbajimba axis.

## **TYPES OF FACIAL MARK IN IDOMALAND**

For the Idoma ethnic group which is the crux of this research, facial mark has so many meanings. However, facial mark in Idomaland have the original purpose of identification, then came other purpose like markings for "the one who goes and come", that of decoration, protection, etc.

The recognized facial marks in Idomaland are OGBAGEJE, OPITO and OBINDE. The Ogbageji also known as line of tears or tear canal, is a straight vertical line on the two sides of the cheek. The Opito is a slash on either side of the cheek from the nose down. It is similar to the Abiku mark found among the Igala ethnic nationality. The Idoma have a migration link with the Igala, thus, the Opito facial mark is an influence from the neighbouring Igala. There is also the Obinde which is usually for beautification. It is a small horizontal line on the two cheeks. This is said to have been adopted from the Yoruba ethnic nationality and the explanation can stand in view of the fact that the two ethnic nationalities belong to the kwa family (Olaosebikan, 1882). Below is the process involved in facial mark in idomaland, both for dentification, protection, decoration etc.

## **THE PROCESS OF FACIAL MARK IN IDOMALAND**

What may surprise one who has seen the marked face of a man or woman is how the cuttings on the face instead of festering, healed completely as an artistic mark. How was this achieved was a reflection of the standard of hygiene and the scientific knowledge of traditional medicine at that time. There are various ways of marking someone.

As soon as the artist was set for displaying his art, some uncontaminated warm water is poured lightly on the face of the person to be marked. The pouring of water, the use of a very sharp razor, nail or other instruments, the fact that the cut was not deep, as it was only the skin on the face that was slit open and laid back, minimized the pain and the flow of blood. To assuage the pain by the wearer, the process has been described as the “snail” this conveyed the impression that, the process is a smooth, harmless movement. Meanwhile, the manner in which the marks were given is very cruel. It was done by putting a local knife in the fire and inserting a thumb into the wearer’s mouth so as to bring out the cheek properly.

After the process of cutting was completed, shea butter cream was applied to the area marked. This acted as a sort of sterilizer in that it destroys all micro organisms that may have gained access in the course of the marking. The next step is that soot from the kitchen roof or from the lamp was smeared on the wound. This will also help keep off infection and to give the marks the desired color when the wound has completely healed. After three days, some mildly sticky leaf of a plant called **INALE** were used to cover the wound. These leaves prevented the wound from festering and were removed after seven days when it was expected that the wound must have dried up, leaving some indelible marks.

From this description and under the modern setting as facial mark is not widely practiced again, facial mark would look like a strange form of art, strange in the sense that a person submits his or herself to some excruciating pain which in the end left him or her with only some indelible marks.

## **PROTECTION MARKS**

Within Idoma, marks of protection are made to ward off evil spirits, robbers, to make one victorious in battles and to attract luck in ones field of endeavour. This was a very strong

belief in those days. These marks can be made on any part of the body, depending at times on the person who is going to wear the marks or the herbalist who makes protective marks. Marks of protection found among the Idoma especially the Agatu Local Government indigenes are very small, faint numerous marks often in clusters or groups.

Herbalists are sometimes sought to advice parents of newborn babies as to how to protect the baby's wellbeing. Often the herbalist will make incision, placing medicine inside to protect the baby from future diseases and unforeseen calamities. Herbalists also make incision for adults who feel another is wishing him evil. According to Chief Godwin Edeikwu, Most often, marks of protection are given to matured males who decide to get such marks. Young ladies patronize herbalists for love potion and other medicine to win men's love or make their men to love them more than other girls. On such occasion, the herbalist will give them marks, while, some prefer these marks hidden, others give according to the whims of the herbalist. However, marks of protection are more commonly found on males than females.

Protective marks in Idomaland, especially in Agatu local Government area is a cluster of groups of three vertical lines. They are often made at the two sides of the face besides the ears. There is a particular medicine used in this part of Idomaland. It is placed inside these marks to protect one against robbers. It is a general belief that even if one having such marks is attacked, the attacker will not succeed in causing him any harm.

This particular medicine is made from the bark of a particular tree, the bark is grinded and combined with a small amount of water. The mixture then forms into a hard ball. To apply the medicine, the ball is dipped in water and rubbed into the incision.

## **MEDICINAL MARKS**

According to Mr, Onuh Abu, herbalist often serves as a counselor to his community, advising them on how to treat and prevent diseases and infections. It is also the herbalist or traditional healer who is the specialist in making incisions for medicinal and protective reasons. The different medicine the herbalist uses to treat various diseases and infections are combinations of plants, herbs, and roots.

In order to treat certain diseases or illness, the herbalist makes an incision using a knife to insert medicine beneath the skin or flesh. The combination of herbs, roots and plants used for treatment are first grinded into a fine powder, water may be added to the powder to create a liquid or form a paste which is easier to insert into the cut. The herbalist also treats the incision with special ointment to stop any bleeding. According to the informant (OKUME) shea butter is the ointment used for both marks of identification and that for medicinal marks. Shea butter is used as lubricant to keep the skin from drying out and it allows the incisions to heal within a week, it is also used to reduce the dryness of the spot so marked in order to reduce the pains associated with such markings. Two of the medicinal marks are most common. One of these two marks is a medicinal mark- for the treatment and prevention of a disease that causes convulsions. When a child is infested with this disease, parts of the body becomes stiff, while at the same time the whole body shakes and the eyes are left wide open. The convulsion may even paralyze part of the body and cause blindness and epilepsy in

children if not well treated or managed. Once a child begins to convulse, he is given to his father or any man to take to the herbalist for treatment. It is believed that the mother cannot bear to see her child sick. To treat the convulsion, the herbalist makes a small straight incision into the infant's both cheeks where it pleases him and a black powder is inserted. The black powder is a grinded charcoal of roots and herbs – meant to cure the child at once.

The medicine inserted into the incision is claimed to be very effective. However, when I spoke to the Chief Medical Director of Ugochukwu Medical center Otukpo, Dr. Ernest Ugochukwu, he claimed that the children continue to come into the hospital seeking treatment after they have already been given the mark. He maintained that these convulsions are caused by malaria. There are other several medicinal marks made according to my finding. A father who does not want his child to be bitten by snake or stung by scorpion will vaccinate the child against such. Also certain medicinal marks are given as antidote for poison. When given such a mark, you cannot be poisoned again, or rather it has the ability to neutralize the poison. Beneficiary of these marks are unanimous about its effectiveness.

This particular type of mark is most prevalent in Agatu local Government area. Usually people believed to have been poisoned are taken there for treatment, after which they are given the mark to ward off such occurrences in the future.

## **DECORATION MARK**

Beautification of the body is part of all cultures, although tastes about what is beautiful differ from one culture to another. In Nigeria, the painting of fingernails, the use of antimony by both sexes, elaborate hairdressing by women and at times, by men, the filling and removal of teeth, staining of teeth, the piercing of lips, nose and ears for different types of ornamentation are some of the several ways, apart from elaborate costumes of beautifying the body.

Nigeria is a land of cultural diversities and this fact is particularly noticeable in the area of beauty aids and their value judgments. Despite the most noticeable cultural fusion going on presently in the country, this diversity is still apparent as ever before. According to Labaran Bakori Saidu 49 years from Katsina, For example, while among the almost pure Fulanis of the Northern part of the Country, the idea of a fat woman would not only be socially repugnant, it would be unthinkable because of the pattern of the pastoral life of the Fulanis, whereas in some other places East of the Niger, a beautiful woman should at least be robust if not really fat, and there is still the traditional fattening ceremony when girls enters adulthood.

Decorative marks can be found on both males and females, but it is most popular among females. Most often decorative marks are attained by girls in their teen years. However, parents can also have the decorative marks made on infants face during naming ceremony. Beauty or decorative marks on adults are usually the idea of the wearer and not their parents. It is what they feel will add to their beauty. This singular factor of consent also distinguished decorative marks from marks of identification. Of all the communities researched, marks of decoration were most popular than marks of identification. Mark of decoration is called **OBINDE** in Idoma land. While, it is a fact that both males and females can have decorative marks, the design of decorative marks would vary depending on individual tastes, the

decorative marks made in villages are almost the same. The only major differences are found between male and female marks. The form of a male decorative mark is usually a horizontal mark on the two cheeks. While females in the researched communities actually like and heavily practiced decorative marks, they did not like the appearance of identification marks. They described identification marks as being unappealing to the eye. However, they viewed decorative marks as enhancing one's beauty. Although to Western eyes, body decoration or facial marks seems ugly, Blanche Payn, an authority in the history of costume and fashion, reminds us that these techniques are no more unnatural than the long blood-red finger-nails of Western women (Payne, 1965).

## **THE ONE WHO GOES AND COMES**

One of the most well-known marks is that given to the child who goes and come, also known as **OMA-KWU** in Idoma land.

After a woman experiences the death of two babies of the same sex, either at birth or shortly after, the third baby of the same sex is marked, it is believed that the same child is trying to come. The following are some reasons for marking a child according to a 78 years old Mr. Ichedi Sunday.

1. To make the child ugly; it is believed that by disfiguring the face or body, one appears ugly to the gods in the other World. Thus, the child will no longer be wanted or appeal to the spirit World. By giving the child marks for this reason was described as grabbing the child and enslaving it to stay in this World.
2. However, if the child dies, these marks are then used to check the next child when eventually the child is born. Thus, such marks are used to identify a child who is coming and going between this world and the next. It is believed that when the child is born and lives, having the same marks as the previous child, that he or she has been rejected from the other world because of the disfiguring marks.

In addition to marks, the child who goes and comes is given an ugly name for example, such a child may be given **OFIE** (which literally means slave) meaning you have been bought here, so you may not return. Other names like **ALACHE**, **EMATOWE** are also spiteful names; the use of these names implies that if the child dies, his or her body will be dumped like rubbish. These names are meant to serve as an antidote and greatly abhorred by the spirit-world and therefore not attracted to them anymore.

The mark for the one who goes and comes is of two types. The first is usually a three horizontal lines across from one another. These marks are put on the chest or face. The other mark used is a slash from one side of the nose to the cheek.

Some light ceremony usually accompany the markings of the one who goes and comes, it is not a merry making ceremony and does not require any special celebration. Be all these as it may, the syndrome of the one who goes and comes on the other hand is fast becoming a myth even among Africans. ( Mr. Emmanuel Ogwola a retired Nurse with Otukpo General Hospital, noted that the point is not that children are no more born with

missing fingers, toes or co-joined, the fact is that the great reduction in infant mortality rates makes the talk of the “one who goes and comes” almost a piece of nonsense. Improved medical facilities, like primary health care and the increase in the number of birth attendants, better health enlightenment programmes have helped many people to realize that no group of children is born primarily to die young. One crucial point however remains unclear, how does one explain the transfer of deformities inflicted on a corpse to the body of a new baby? Secondly, how does a new baby “inherits” non-biological deformities inflicted on a corpse? May be the talk of a transfer presumes re-incarnation.

Furthermore, psychologist argued that a pregnant woman is usually so deeply disturbed by both the death and may be amputation of a part of a baby’s body that the emotional stress is strong enough to create an involvement which is physically capable of affecting the unborn child. Whichever way, the fact remains that the mystery of the one who goes and comes has not completely been unraveled, though the practice of markings such children are obsolete. Results could have been gotten from markings if the practice was allowed to evolve, but what is supposed to enforce our cultural traits were dropped as a result of colonial impositions. It can finally be said that marking the “one who goes and comes” is orchestrated based on the firm believe of Africans in life after death.

### **IMPACT OF SLAVE TRADE ON FACIAL MARK IN IDOMA LAND**

The link between slave trade and facial mark is simply for family and ethnic identification. Facial marks have definite forms to distinguish various families within an ethnic group or in a geographical area. With facial marks, it is easy to identify people at a glance (Ogaba, 2018).

Furthermore, if people are branded, they can easily be identified when they are alleged to have committed certain criminal offences and possibly paraded for identification. While facial marks may not have started as a result of slave trade, slave trade or rather slave raiding was responsible for the continuation and dominance of facial marks throughout Africa. (Ogaba, 2018). With the emergence of slave raiding, the practice of facial markings tremendously increased. By the late 1800’s tribal markings became highly important not only for ethnic identification but because they allow one to return to their roots even if they were captured and taken into slavery. Once taken into bondage, tribal markings allowed slaves to unite with other members of their ethnic group who had also been captured. Additionally, if one was free or escape, tribal marks were a helpful means to retracing one’s roots.

The prevalence of facial mark was due largely to the dominant presence of slave raiding and the attendant ethnic wars. At the time in question, wars were organized or arranged so that those captured can be sold into slavery and there were ready markets and willing buyers for onward shipment to the various plantations abroad/West Indians. These slave wars were referred to in Idoma land as **EFU ONYA (Horse War)** because slave raiders usually come on horses. It was further adduced that as a result of slave raiders

consistently threatening community solidarity and security, ethnic nationalities became more conscious of their identity and develop a great pride in their ethnic heritage and community; so the practice which came into being without slave trade in mind became useful as a means against being taken captive as slave (Ogaba, 2018).

### **IMPACT OF THE NIGERIA CIVIL WAR ON FACIAL MARK IN IDOMA LAND**

As it has been rightly pointed out above, the link between slave trade, facial mark and the Nigeria civil war is simply for family and ethnic identification. Facial mark has definite forms to distinguish various families within an ethnic group or in a geographical area. With facial marks, it is easier to identify people at a distance or at a glance.

In as much as facial mark did not start as a result of the Nigeria civil war, the practice attained its peak during the war.

We are all conversant with the fact that in 1967, war broke out between the Federal troops and Biafra army, predominantly Igbo. Basorun (2013) maintained that the civil war was felt most by people sharing boundary with the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria. During my introductory remark, I mentioned that the peripheral Idoma include the Ntezi and Akpoto of Abakaliki in the present day Ebonyi State, the Ete of Nssuka in Enugu State also form part of this group. (Agbo, 2018).

With the outbreak of the Nigeria civil war, the Idoma towns sharing boundary with the Igbo villages became target of attack by the federal troop. It became unavoidably important for those living in those border towns to adopt a strategy with which they will no longer be attacked and killed by the Federal troops or mistaken for Igbo ethnic nationality.

Facial marking though in-existence before then, became the only way through which the idoma nation could be saved from the Federal troop. People born from the late 1960s to the early 1970s in Idoma land were most affected and therefore massively marked, so as to avoid being mistaken for the Igbo race (Adadu, 2018).

Geographically, Idoma villages bordering Igbo villages like, Owukpa, Orokamu in the present day Ogbadibo local Government area, Igah Okpaya in Apa local Government area, Oju local Government area and Ado local Government area which share boundary with Ebonyi State were most affected. (Agbo, 2018).

Facial marks given to differentiate the people from Igbo were of two types. One is the two straight marks popularly call Ogbageje (line of tears) and Opito. The Opito is a diagonal line from the nose to the cheek. Apart from these two, other facial marks adopted by these areas are for protection, medicine and decoration.

With the end of the Nigeria Civil War, the practice of facial mark greatly declined. After the introduction of the Federal Government policy of the 3Rs, i.e reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation, the hostility by the federal troop ceased and this also reduced the need to be marked by people of the affected areas (Basorun, 2013). At

present, the practice has almost diminished except for medicinal, protection and decorative purposes which are still being practiced in isolated places.

### **CURRENT TREND AND THE FUTURE OF FACIAL MARK**

Facial mark is a sensitive issue because it permanently marks one for life, and this art is practiced by many ethnic nationalities not only for aesthetic reasons but for protective, medicinal and ethnic identification depending on the place. From the research done, there are different reasons for facial markings.

How can one come terms with the scenario below: According to Mr. Joseph Opaluwa, one morning in the late 1960s, a six year old Danjuma of Igala extraction approached his father and insisted that he should be given cuts that Igala people wear on their faces with pride. Danjuma felt that he could no longer endure the ridicule of his schoolmates who taunted him for not having the facial marks. Though the marks here usually administered to Igala infants too young to dread the operation, the young boys viewed the mark as a sign of bravery. They regarded those without them as cowards who could not face the knife. Until then, Danjuma's father had resisted giving his son the facial marks, but that morning, pressured by his son's determination to prove his bravery, he ordered three deep horizontal cuts on each side of the boy's face. Be this as it may, facial marking and other forms of body adornments is becoming unpopular among the young elites partly because of the unfortunate scars it leaves when heavy keloid eruption results and partly because in this era of politics, permanent identification marks could be of great disadvantage in any instance of political eruption.

Another reason is that, it is only traditional surgeons that make these marks and there have been cases of infection resulting in loss of lives, and young and enlightened parents are understandably scared to expose their offspring to this danger. Moreover, in this era of HIV virus and other communicable diseases, the use of unsterilized instruments by these traditional practitioners put one at the risk of contacting these diseases when they engage in this practice.

This practice of facial marking is dying out but can still be found among the more remote and less sophisticated people today. It is common to the human race and to women especially to attempt to enhance natural beauty in the form of facial marks and other body adornment, but with the avalanche of other beauty enhancement materials like make-up kits, lalee, etc, there is a great reduction in the practice of facial markings among ladies.

Furthermore, some of the reasons given for not liking identification marks, especially those on the face are that, it actually takes away one's natural beauty. It can be used to insult someone, at first impression, you don't need to be told who you are meeting. Additionally, many said the reasons for getting identification marks no longer exists as people can identify each other through verbal communication. Also, slave raiding and ethnic wars no longer threaten to dismember communities. Still, some people may not want to be identified because of rivalries between certain ethnic groups. All these reasons have greatly reduced the desire to be marked facially and permanently.

## CONCLUSION

Facial marks hold many different meanings and uses for idoma ethnic group. While, facial marks was a dominant practice, because it served as marks of identification, indicating one's family and ethnic background, and at times, the ethnic group's historical migration pattern, many people no longer see the need for it. Yet this practice is continued in isolated cases. Apart from identification, facial markings serves as a means of protection, decoration and for health care purposes.

Facial marks attained its peak during the slave trade and the Nigeria civil war, at these points, people were marked indiscriminately for the purpose of identification. With the abolition of slave trade and the end of the Nigeria civil war, the need for markings in Idomaland greatly declined.

Health risk is another factor that contributed to the decline in the art of facial mark in Idomaland. With all sorts of viruses around and with the crude method of using unsterilized instruments to carry out this practice, many stand the risk of contacting diseases like HIV, Hepatitis B etc. Health enlightenment programmes and improved medical facilities have helped many people to realize the danger associated with the practice.

Today, the practice of facial markings in Idomaland has paled into insignificance or has been greatly modified. It can therefore be said that the art has again suffered the fate of some of our traditional arts which are generally dismissed as primitive irrespective of their significance to the lives of the people that practiced them.

It can therefore be said that it is again the defeat of Africans by European superimposing their culture, language etc and making sure that they downplay anything that has to do with Africa, giving it all sorts of names and maintaining that it is repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscious.

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### Interview Conducted

- Mr. Godwin Ediekwu, 80, Retired Teacher, Opaha (Apa Local Government), 15<sup>th</sup> November 2017.
- Mr. Ogli Egbogo, 79, Retired Community Health Attendant, Ugbokpo (Apa Local Government), 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017.
- Mr. Abu Onuh, 74, Head Master Odugbo (Apa Local Government), 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017.
- Dr. Ernest Ugochukwu, 50, Medical Doctor, Otukpo, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2017.
- Mallam Labaran Saidu Bakori, 49, Civil Servant, Katsina Bakori, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

- Mr. Ichedi Sunday, 75, Ex-Vice Chairman Apa Local Government Council Ugbokpo, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2017.
- Mr. Emmanuel Ogwola ,72, (Rtd. Nurse), General Hospital Otukpo, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2017.
- Mr. Joseph Opaluwa, 75, Timber Trader Ankpa, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2018.
- Mr. Abubakar Ameh, 55, Civil Servant, Ankpa Local Government Secretariat, 7<sup>th</sup> January 2018.
- Mr. Godwin Acheme, is a teacher and Custodian of Tradition in Edikwu, Apa Local Government, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018.
- Mrs. Ochanya Okpe, 80, Trader at Otukpo central market, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2017.
- Mrs. Ene Agada, 68, petty trader at sabon Gari Otukpo, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2017.